

## Jeffords says he'll support Roberts for high court

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Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., said Wednesday he would vote to confirm Judge John Roberts as chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court when the Senate votes on Roberts' nomination on Thursday.

"With the information and sworn testimony on the record it is clear Judge Roberts has the necessary legal experience and character to be the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court," Jeffords said in a statement released by his office Wednesday evening. "It also appears that Judge Roberts will use the law and the Constitution to make his judicial decisions, not his ideological or personal beliefs."

Jeffords, the Senate's lone independent, joined 20 Democrats who had said by late in the day Wednesday that they would support Roberts. Those include Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., the senior minority member of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Twenty other Democrats have said they will vote against Roberts.

Jeffords' position was uncertain, given his contentious relationship with the Bush administration. Jeffords left the Republican party in 2001 over his disagreement with what he said was the rightward drift of the party.

Vermont's junior senator, who is retiring at the end of next year, generally has deferred to the president on executive branch appointments. But he voted earlier this year against the nomination of Condoleezza Rice as secretary of state, criticizing her for her role in promoting the Iraq war as national security adviser.

"It has been my general policy while in the Senate to support the executive branch nominations made by a president, provided the individual is appropriately qualified and capable of performing the duties required of the position," Jeffords said. "However, while a position in the executive branch lasts only as long as the president remains in office, an appointment to the federal bench is for the life of the nominee."

Jeffords said he gained confidence in Roberts from the judge's statements to the Judiciary Committee that he would be an impartial justice who would not bring a political agenda to the high court.

Jeffords quoted Roberts, who told the committee, "I will be vigilant to protect the independence and integrity of the Supreme Court, and I will work to ensure that it upholds the rule of law and safeguards those liberties that make this land one of endless possibilities for all Americans."

The Vermont senator said, "I trust he will stay true to these words during his tenure as chief justice. History will be the judge."